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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ Roxio Goes Its Own Way ~ Nintendo Grows Up? ~ E3 2001 Previews!

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-* Price War Has PC Makers Fighting! *-
-* Napster To Use "Acoustic" Fingerprints! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
.....

"Saying it like it is!"

This would have been a perfect week for a vacation! What beautiful weather we had here in New England - sunshine and warm during the day, a little cool in the evening. I spent most of last weekend outside working in the yard, and got a lot accomplished without the heat and humidity to slow me down. This is what Spring is all about!

I really must get up on a soapbox this week. I haven't really had much to say lately, but something at work really made me laugh, and wonder how people can really be stupid. I know, it's not considered nice to call people stupid. However, in some cases, I believe it's just plain true. I work in a major clinic/hospital. We use computers like most companies. Like most users, the majority are not computer-savvy like you and I might consider ourselves. I'm not saying we're experts - I'm certainly not. But we've learned some common sense when using them.

We've all been aware of computer viruses. Whether or not we've been victimized is irrelevant. At most hospitals, I'd say it was safe to say that the medical staff consists of some pretty intelligent people. Ever notice that the more "intelligent" people are, the less common sense they seem to possess? The most recent virus to hit the world is this "Homepage" virus. Like most viruses that hit major companies, this one hit us as well. I received it a few times and realized that it was likely a virus and deleted it, like we're supposed to do. Shortly after the virus started spreading, our IT sent out a global e-mail warning every user what to look out for, and what to do if the virus-infected message appeared. Do you think people paid any attention??!! Guess what population of my workplace was responsible for the proliferation of this virus! The doctors!! C'mon!

Now, I realize that there will always be a few people who will open these messages without realizing what they're doing - no matter how bright they might be. It happens. But, we received ample warning of this virus, a notice of exactly how the virus would appear (subject line and exact message), and what to do when we saw it. And rarely did we see just a single message with the virus; it was usually a clump of messages that were identical. Why did people keep opening up these messages/attachments? They're stupid! I said above that I thought it was humorous. Of course, most viruses that strike large businesses are potentially destructive. That's not funny. But, just before I left for the day, I noticed a message from the head of our IT department. I was on my way out the door when I spotted it, so I didn't read the entire message. However, the thumbnail of the message showed exasperation. This guy thought as I did: why? He was at a loss for words to understand why. The IT department was doing everything

within its power to curtail this virus so the e-mail service could continue to function. It couldn't. The virus continued to bog down our service all day! As soon as it was cleaned up, someone else would start the mess all over again by opening up a virus-infected message! I logged on to our e-mail server from home and I was still getting virus-infected messages as late as 6:00 p.m.! I figure I'll have a bunch more to delete when I get in on Friday, unless the IT department finds a way to remotely delete them all. I love seeing "intelligent" people act like idiots - no common sense. Who said stupidity couldn't be funny? And best of all, we don't have these worries on Atari machines!

Don't forget your Mother this weekend, on Mother's Day! Call, write, visit, or all of the above!

Until next time...

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NoSTalgia 1.1

NoSTalgia 1.1 is now available !

NoSTalgia is an Atari ST emulator for Power Macintosh (Mac OS 8.x, 9.X and Mac OS X)

What's new in version 1.1

- Fixed the control key.
- Fixed the disk menu.
- Added 14 Mb memory option.
- Added ST mouse driver for Apps using LineA/VDI (GEM apps), only one cursor (cart.img needed).
- Fixed the memory info in the freeze format (1.0 saved states are not compatible with NoSTalgia 1.1).
- Fixed the Fullscreen mode (Mac OS 9/8).
- Fixed Harddisk partitions creation.
- The 'Auto frames' option is now in the 'frame rate' menu.

NoSTalgia is freeware, infos and download at :

<http://users.skynet.be/sky39147/>

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Philippe Gorin (ph.gerin@kagi.com)

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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Nordic Atari Show in Malmoe, Sweden 16-17/6

The seventh annual Nordic Atari Show (NAS) will take place in beautiful Malmö this year. Malmö is located in the far south of Sweden. Atari enthusiasts from all over the country and abroad will gather together and participate in or just visit the exhibition.

The show is opened 16/-17/6 and we welcome anyone to join the show. Entrance fee is SKR 50/day (appr. 5 EUR).

16/32 Systems from England will be there selling all kinds of Atari products. If you want to buy anything special please contact him on nick@1632systems.co.uk in advance or visit <http://www.1632systems.co.uk/> ... He really needs to know what stuff to bring...

There will also be second hand Atari computers, monitors etc on sell. Please contact bebbe.adolfsson@swipnet.se in advance for availability of any specific item you would like to get.

If you want to sell anything yourself just bring the stuff with you. There will be plenty of tables available at no extra fee!

We plan to do a lot of networking this year so bring your Ethernet adapters, null modem cables, MIDI cables, etc to join the network.

As Malmö is located close to the main European continent we hope to get visitors from Denmark, Germany, Poland, etc too. And, thanks to the new bridge from Copenhagen it's very easy to get there!

For more info browse to <http://www.sak.nu/> and click on the "Nordic Atari Show" button. Info in English can be found further down on the page, maps included.

--

Kenneth Medin <kennethm@tripnet.se>
Atari TT at home: <http://atari.mine.nu/>

CCAG 2001

ATTENTION RETROGAMERS, COMPUTER COLLECTORS, VIDEO GAME FANATICS!!!!

WE'RE BACK!!..

CCAG 2001
(Classic Computer and Gaming 2001)

If you like collecting old computers, video games, and enjoy using them still, then come join us on:

June 30th, 2001
9AM till 6PM

National Guard Armory
IT'S ON ROUTE 57!!!

(actual address)
3520 Grove Avenue
Lorain, Ohio 44055-2048
(On Route 57, going North of I-90/Route 2)

IT'S FREE!

Both vendors and attendees!
Computer User Groups and vendors inside, flea market outside!

5,000 square feet of indoor space and an additional 5,000 square feet of outdoor space is available along with ample parking.

Setup: 29th, June, 2001
6PM-10PM

Please Call Ahead for Reservations:

Jim W. Krych jwkrych@n2net.net
440-979-9295
Fred M. Horvat fmh@netzero.net
440-286-2566
And these other CCAG 2001 organizers:
Thomas J. McLaren sirthomas@uk2.net

Please visit this site:

<http://tomheroes.com/ccag.htm>

As of 05/08/2001
User Groups:
Erie PA Atari Group
TI Chips
Cleveland Classic Atari Group

Vendors:
1632 Systems-From the UK!!!
C.S. Vintage Games
L.R.O. Computers
Tomorrow's Heroes
Retropolis
Songbird Productions
Video Game Connection
Ramcharged Computers

People/Organizations:
David S. Brain
Fred Wagaman
Harry Dodgson
Alan Hewston
Thomas McLaren
Michael White(Bally/Astrocade)
Classic Gamer Magazine
John Litva

Possible Attendees!!!
Atari7800.com

Special Guest!!!
Pitfall Harry

We are looking to do a "Classic Game Experience" this year!
One room is going to be set up for playing classic computer and video game cartoons and commercials. The other room is going to be an emulator room-MAME, etc.

We already have one person bringing a Crazy Climber cocktail arcade game, John Litva. And, another vendor has promised to bring several arcade games as well. Please email us if you wish to bring an arcade game to the show.

We have a food service this year! The wife of one of our organizers, will be providing food, soda, and such!

Attention Atari ST/Falcon/TT users!!!
If you want anything from 1632 Systems, please contact:

Nick Harlow
<http://www.1632systems.co.uk/>
<http://catalog.zen.co.uk/actinic/1632Systems/>

See ya at the CCAG!

=~==~==

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This has been one of those strange weeks where the days seem to drag on, but the week itself seems to fly by. Each day felt like an eternity, but the week itself seemed to disappear.

I don't pretend to understand... or even really care... why things seem so out of whack. It just strikes me as odd.

I guess that it's just another case in point about perception. We tend to think of what we perceive as reality. If that were true, we'd probably all agree on everything. But we don't (big surprise, huh?).

Although that would make for a safer, more peaceful world, it'd also be completely boring. Sure, arguing is a downer, but the exchange of ideas is usually what drives us forward.

In the computer world, people are still arguing over which operating system is the "best". Amid all the flame and smoke (not to mention mirrors), some of us seem to have forgotten that your choice of OS should be based on your wants and needs, not on the latest advertising hype or what more people seem to think you should be using.

I still don't see a problem with TOS. I'm comfortable with it, it still works (you don't ever hear about plans to have to re-register it in

order to be able to use it), it doesn't bog the system down with all the eye-candy and, let's face it, it's got personality.

The problem, rather, is the hardware. In it's day, the ST was one smokin' machine. But the way technology has progressed in the past... what?... sixteen or seventeen years?... it's definitely outdated.

Sure, it can still do what it was designed to do, but there's so much more out there today: High speed internet access, millions of colors, surround sound, 3D video, and all the rest are things that were never even dreamt of when the ST was being designed.

Some people perceive that these new bells and whistles are what computers are all about. But when you get right down to it, a computer is a tool, sometimes a hobby, but it's just a collection of circuits and some binary code. It's what you want to do with it that's important.

If your trusty ST does everything you want/need it to do, keep on using it. If it doesn't, don't feel bad about looking for something else. Just remember all the fun and education that took place at that old 1040!

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st Newsgroup
=====

Mike Marion asks about using the same hard drive for WinTel and Atari:

"I vaguely remember hearing of software to format a SCSI hard drive so that it could be read by both Wintel and Atari - Am I hallucinating?"

Uwe Seimet tells Mike:

"No, you can do that with the HDDRIVER software:
http://www.seimet.de/atari_english.html.

Note that there is no need for formatting, this is just a question of partitioning."

Djordje Vukovic posts this about a neat little accessory:

"I came upon an interesting little accessory which may prove useful:
<<http://atarihr.atari.org/datoteke/dimfile.zip>>

It loads a floppy-disk image file (.DIM, .MSA or .ST) as a (RAM) disk drive so programs can be executed from it, and it can write "disk" content back into a disk image file. It can overtake an existing drive letter (e.g. floppy A or B or any hard-disk partition). There is just a little documentation (only in a not-very-good English) but it seems that some parameters of the new "drive" can be adjusted and even its boot sector executed. I didn't succeed to activate this feature."

Steve Sweet tells Djordje:

"This has been around for a bit, i use it to locate individual files from my eCopy backups (*.DIM files)."

Mark Beddingfield tells Djordje that it...

"Sounds good but the URL doesn't seem to work."

Djordje tells Mark:

"Ooops! There is a link to dimfile.zip from
<http://atarihr.atari.org/datoteke.html>
but the file itself is on
<http://atarihr.atari.org/slike/datoteke/byvuk/dimfile.zip>
Sorry."

Lyndon Amsdon throws out an idea for programmers:

"Just an idea here.

Is it possible to stop GEM windows from maximising to the whole screen?

Can it maximise but leave x number of pixels at the bottom of the
screen free?

I think this would be useful in combination with Appline/Start Me Up as
these get hidden and manually moving it can become tiresome.

Or has it been done already?"

Steve Sweet tells Lyndon:

"Jinnee introduced this environment variable to the world, not sure
what supports it though!

```
#_ENV SCREENBORDER=0,16,0,0
```

It does limit the window parameters for Jinnee itself, haven't seen
anything else utilize it though!."

Lonny Pursell tells Steve:

"That seems really simple and easy to use. Have you any
detailed docs perhaps from the Jinnee manual?"

Steve tells Lonny:

"I'm afraid I've yet to see a Jinnee manual, Peter West may be watching
this though, he's the keeper of the enchanted Scrolls of Jinnee as I
understand it, if he is he'll pop by soon."

Peter jumps out from behind the curtains and tells Steve:

"Yep I'm watching <smile>

The manual should now be available from Atari Workshop. I've had
my copy for a month or more. Regarding \$Screenborder, all it says
(in Settings... > Window placement) is:

When Use \$SCREENBORDER is active, instead of the values in the
editable fields the area left clear will depend on the value
stored in the environmental variable of the same name (its format
is similar to the above* pixel values for left,top,right,bottom).
{NB - No spaces!}

This environment variable can be set in various ways. In MAGX.INF use an entry such as:

```
#_ENV SCREENBORDER=0,40,0,30
```

which gives no spacing at left and right, 40 pixels at the top and 30 at the bottom.

* This refers to the 'Distance from screen edge' editable fields: Here the distance from the Left, Upper, Right and Lower edge of the screen, in pixels, in which windows will not be placed can be freely defined. This makes it easy to ensure windows are not opened over your desktop icons or open over an installed start-or application-bar and so on."

Walter Cole asks about emulating an ST:

"After using Atari 1040ST and STe for 14 years, I recently acquired a PC with a reasonable amount of computing power (633 MHZ, 64 MB RAM, 20 GB HD and Windows ME.)

I would like to be able to run my Atari programs, since I have a lot of useful files and programs and I'm not sure how long my Atari stuff will continue to function.

There used to be a Gemulator program. Is there anything available now that will run on a PC with Windows ME?

Any help will be appreciated."

Mike Marion tells Walter:

"Hi Walter - Sounds like my situation, Yes I am using Gemulator on a wintel laptop - all my work activities are on TOS/GEM, only use wintel for browsing etc. Gemulator 2000 is easy to set-up and use. Darek Mihocka the author (although sometimes a little testy to deal with) has produced a really first rate product which is a free download. Try; <http://www.emulators.com/gemul8r.htm>"

Martin Doering tells Mike:

"Yes, and gemulator 2000 is faster, than all other emulators together, because of it's optimized assembler kernel. It provides a good hardware emulation, even of such things like harddisk and floppy - you can use the native pc floppy drive! The only thing is, that it does not work well with german keyboards."

Paul Caillet adds:

"A friend has 2 PCs (Athlon, Pentium III) with Windows ME, and he has installed STEem 1.5b with TOS 1.02 or TOS 2.06, and that works very well (MIDI In & Out are available too) ...

STEem : <http://www.pyridine.co.uk/steem/index.htm>

My Web site for others stuff :

<http://atari.georezo.net/atari/emul/index.htm> "

Chris Simon has done some messing about with STiK2 and posts this:

"Following the recent turmoil over the Zetnet numbers, I reproduce below my minimal scripts for Stik2 PPP/PAP, using a Falcon's Serial 2 port. I'd also be grateful for any

comments regarding the variables (highlighted in comments) that I'd like to move from default.cfg to a dial script, but have been unable to do so.

DEFAULT.CFG

```
# STiK2 config file
ALLOCMEM = 300000
SERIALPORT = Serial 2
DIALFILE = {your default dial script file}
PROTOCOL = 2
SLICE = 0
# The USERNAME variable must appear in default.cfg not dial.scr
otherwise
# Stik2 aborts on booting saying "USERNAME or PAP_ID must be defined"
USERNAME = {your 1000**** Zetnet ID}
# SMTP_HOST must appear in default.cfg not dial.scr otherwise QDialer
# reports "Unknown Variable". However, this is an optional variable to
allow
# other clients to use Stik's SMTP routines it seems.
SMTP_HOST=mail.zetnet.co.uk
# The following 2 variables must appear in default.cfg not dial.scr
otherwise QDialer
# reports "Unknown Variable".
# Apparently, they're only used by other client programs, e.g. CAB.OVL,
but are not optional!
# FULLNAME *must* appear otherwise QDialer hangs on reading the dial
file.
# EMAIL *must* appear otherwise Stik2 aborts on booting with 2 bombs
and then
# "Stik magic string doesn't match".
FULLNAME = {your full name}
EMAIL={your full email address}
```

DIAL.SCR (or whatever name you give it)

```
# Dial script file for STiK.ACC
BAUD_RATE = 115200
HANGUP = ATH
PREFIX = ATW2DT
INIT = ATZ
CONNECT_WAIT = 95
REDIAL_DELAY = 2
PHONE_NUMBER = 08081405050, {or the new 0845 number, or the Surftime
number}
SUCCESS = CDWAIT
FAILURE = BUSY
FAILURE = NO CARRIER
FAILURE = NO DIALTONE
CDVALID = TRUE
PASSWORD={your password}
NAMESERVER = 194.247.47.47
HOSTNAME = zetnet.co.uk "
```

John Garone tells Chris:

"Serial Port? Mine is set to Modem 2 (same set-up but no Magic).

Maybe you should use the longer CFG file. This is all I have activated in the Default.cfg file (all else is in the Dial.scr file and although

the boot info states to configure items missing in the CFG file, Stik2 is still activated and works here without re-booting):

CFG (use your info)

```
ALLOCMEM = 200000
SERIALPORT = Modem 2
CDVALID = TRUE
DIALFILE = 115-2458.SCR
CLIENT_IP =
TTL = 64
PING_TTL = 255
MTU = 1524
RCV_WND = 4572
PROTOCOL = 2
REPORT = 0
UP_RESPONSE = 3
YIELD = 0
SLICE = 0 "
```

Chris tells John:

"Hmm, I see what you mean. But I don't think it mattered - Qdialer was interpreting it as and displaying Modem 2 anyway. I've now changed it to Modem 2 in the file, and the only effect that's had is to cause Stik to display an error message on booting! "Conf Report 0 Stik Report 0" or something like that.

I'll try your version, although I was only following the documentation to the letter to remove items that were not necessary. So you reckon when Qdialer reports unknown variables and when Sting reports items missing, it's OK???

I've just tried my own scripts again, moving the handful of variables I had left, into the .SCR file but it's still causing Stik to crash on booting. Anyway, I'll try yours next."

Dennis Bishop asks about replacing his TT's keyboard:

"While I dislike the idea, is there something that'll let an clone keyboard be used on a TT? or does anyone maybe have a MegaST / TT that's dead but they keyboard is ok?"

Lonny Pursell tells Dennis:

"If you wish to avoid inflated prices for original Atari keyboards have a look at this page:

<http://gem.win.co.nz/mario/hardware/qwertyx.html>

Check to see if your local dealer has this."

Barrie at Atarispares tells Dennis:

"Qwertyx price is NZ\$150 = about \$75 US plus shipping plus clone kbrd and mouse.

My price for (TT) Mega STE kbrd is \$40 plus (2kgs) shipping, standard Atari gear.

You choose."

Lonny tells Barrie:

"That's a good price for a real Atari keyboard. When I said inflated I was referring to US dealers, 2 of which want over 150 USD for just a keyboard."

Geoff Phillips asks about doctoring an ST's video:

"In that past, I've used a simple cable from my old Atari ST, taking composite out (pin 2 I think) and ground, and getting a fine picture on the TV.

I've just bought a new old (humour intended) ST, which doesn't have the modulator sticking out the back, but has what looks like the standard video connector coming out. Although I can see the RGB are working, by briefly touching them to the composite in of the TV, and hear audio, I don't get anything from the Composite Out, not fuzzy, just totally absent.

I have two questions: firstly, is the composite out missing from certain 1040's. Secondly, is there a modulator I could buy - presumably sticking out the back like the Amiga one used to do. Worst case, I could wire up an RGB to the scart at the back of the telly, but I wasn't sure the TV had RGB capability, and it's less convenient to go to the back of the set.

I'm in the UK by the way."

Dave Wade tells Geoff:

"If your TV has a scart socket it may already have RGB in. SCART has connections for both RGB and Composite, and they are not implemented consistently. If it has RGB the only problem with connecting ATARI output to the scart is the sync. If I remember correctly one has "composite sync" (i.e. H-Sync and V-SYNC on same pin) and the other has separate syncs. I think my scart lead has low value resistors in (33 or 47 ohm) to link them together. Any way you should be able to find pin-outs on the NET. If you are stuck I can open up my lead."

Geoff tells Dave:

"Thanks for that info - it's almost unbelievable that they made these things without composite output, so it looks like I'll try to get RGB going.

I've trawled the net for information on a lead to do the RGB route, but without success. Maplin used to do a lead, but it is not listed on their online catalogue.

I tried quickly a straight rgb and ground connection, but that didn't do the trick, presumably I need to put a sync in somewhere too."

Mark Beddingfield adds:

"There were very few STFs compared to the rest of the STs. I think standard STs used the RF cct to create a Sync signal? Any way you need to use 6 signals from you ST. R, G, B, horizontal and vertical sync and ground. You need a FULL scart capable TV to use it. But you cannot use

it on a Composite input unless you get a specific device to do so. You could get an Amiga external modulator and make a cable to connect that, then use the Composite port on that."

Bob Retelle jumps in and adds his thoughts:

"Unfortunately I know nothing about SCART, but I seem to recall there was a cable that would go from the RGB connector to the SCART connector on a TV. Where you would get something like that now is something I can't begin to guess.

You really DON'T want to go by way of an RF modulator. The signal quality is absolutely terrible. Low Resolution games are barely acceptable, and Medium Resolution 80 column text will make you go blind."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next time around, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~==~==

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo "Grows Up"?!
"~~~~~" E3 2001 Previews! "Shrek"!
Portable Atari 2600!
And much much more!

=~==~==

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
"~~~~~"

Square Announces Product Lineup for Electronic Entertainment Expo 2001

Square Electronic Arts announced the titles to be showcased at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) to be held May 17-19, 2001 in Los Angeles.

Square's product lineup features a special bundle package titled FINAL FANTASY CHRONICLES: FINAL FANTASY IV CHRONO TRIGGER, including two titles which have been updated for the PlayStation game console, and the highly anticipated FINAL FANTASY X, the next release in the popular series, pushing the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system to new levels.

Square is also breaking new ground with Square Pictures' production of the first computer-generated (CG), animated motion picture featuring hyperReal characters in FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN, scheduled for release on

July 11, 2001, by Columbia Pictures. The film seeks to reach new heights in CG films by simulating human emotions and movements more realistically than ever before. Visitors at E3 will have the opportunity to get a sneak peek at the state-of-the-art technology used in this film featuring the vocal talents of Alec Baldwin, Steve Buscemi, Peri Gilpin, Ming-Na, Ving Rhames, Donald Sutherland and James Woods, and directed by Hironobu Sakaguchi, the brilliant creator of the FINAL FANTASY game series.

The following PlayStation titles will be unveiled at E3 2001:

FINAL FANTASY CHRONICLES: FINAL FANTASY IV CHRONO TRIGGER

This compilation package will include updates of two classic SQUARESOFT role-playing games, available for the first time in North America for the PlayStation game console. Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) versions of both titles have become extremely difficult to find and have been favorites of gamers since their original release many years ago. FINAL FANTASY CHRONICLES is scheduled to be released this July in North America.

FINAL FANTASY IV - Originally released for the SNES in 1991 as FINAL FANTASY II, FINAL FANTASY IV continues to be praised by gamers and critics alike as a groundbreaking title with its engrossing storyline and revolutionary Active Time Battle (ATB) system. New FINAL FANTASY IV features include a "dash" feature, allowing players to move quickly through towns and dungeons; a "two-player mode" allowing two players to participate in battles together; and a completely new, improved localization of the original unedited story. In addition, it contains new cinematic sequences and includes all the original monsters, abilities, items and scenes that were not included in the SNES version.

CHRONO TRIGGER - Originally released for the SNES in 1995, CHRONO TRIGGER is a time-traveling role-playing game that takes players on a journey to several different time periods. A collaboration between Hironobu Sakaguchi (FINAL FANTASY series), Yuji Horii (Dragon Quest) and Akira Toriyama (Dragon Ball Z), the title was dubbed the "Dream Project" and sold a record-breaking 2,500,000+ units in Japan in its original release, receiving numerous accolades for having the highest quality graphics and sound, as well as an innovative battle system. The updated version includes new opening and closing cinematic scenes, and several re-creations of memorable sequences, all of which add to the game's emotional impact, answer lingering questions, and offer insight into the game's successor, CHRONO CROSS.

The following PlayStation 2 title will be unveiled at E3 2001:

FINAL FANTASY X - One of the most anticipated titles for the PlayStation 2, FINAL FANTASY X is the first title in the popular franchise to be released for the PlayStation 2. With the caliber of artistic, creative and developmental talents involved in the project, FINAL FANTASY X will set new standards for games released for the PlayStation 2, reminiscent of the technological feats FINAL FANTASY VII accomplished on the original PlayStation in 1997.

The main character, Tidus, is a star player of blitzball, a popular full-contact sport. After miraculously surviving the destruction of his homeland, he awakens among ruins. He befriends a young woman named Yuna on her journey through the world of Spira. As a summoner, Yuna must travel to distant temples and learn the secret arts of summoning aeons -- powerful spirits of yore, in order to defeat Sin. Tidus learns that a thousand years in the past, mankind lived in spectacular cities and relied on machines for

everything, until Sin suddenly appeared and destroyed all civilization. Now, people shun technology, and no one knows when Sin will strike next. This installment of FINAL FANTASY features a distinct Asian influence, bringing a fresh feel to the characters, music, settings and story. FINAL FANTASY X is scheduled to be released early 2002 in North America.

Eidos Showcases Explosive Game Line-up At 2001 Electronic Entertainment Expo

Eidos Interactive announced its game line-up for the upcoming Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), held May 17-20, in Los Angeles, California. Reinforcing its focus on creating platform-leading character-based brands, Eidos will present several new titles from key gaming powerhouses including Crystal Dynamics, the development studio known for the Gex and Soul Reaver franchises; Core Design, the creators of the world-famous Tomb Raider series; Ion Storm, the developers of PC Gamer Magazine's 2001 Game of The Year, Deus Ex; and Pyro Studios, developers of the hugely-successful strategy series, Commandos.

"I firmly believe that Eidos' current lineup is one of the strongest ever, highlighted by new titles based on existing, popular franchises in addition to all new and original titles developed specifically to take advantage of the next-generation hardware," said Rob Dyer, President of Eidos Interactive, US. "There is no question that our upcoming titles reflect our capacity to produce the highest-quality, most recognizable and compelling franchises on the market today, as proven by the undeniable popularity of gaming personalities such as Lara Croft and Raziel."

Among the new games and characters making their public debut at E3 is Blood Omen 2 for the PlayStation 2. Four hundred years has passed since the vampire Kain damned the world in the original Blood Omen. Now Kain, who once controlled the land of Nosgoth with his vampire legions, finds his brethren slain and his dark powers stripped by a mysterious figure. To reclaim his rule and have his vengeance, Kain must overcome legions of warriors and demons to crush the traitors to his kind. Blood Omen 2 features intensive combat and blocking systems and spine-chilling environments and demonic enemies. Blood Omen 2 will arrive in stores this Winter.

As an Xbox exclusive title created by Crystal Dynamics, Mad Dash combines high-speed combat racing with elements of 3D action/adventure platformers. Mad Dash takes full advantage of the Xbox hardware, featuring incredibly high framerates, astoundingly lush and immense environments, and fantastic four-player competition. There are nine original characters in the game, led by Chops the warthog, Sid the ultra-hip alley cat, and Zero-G, the gravity-defying space dog. Mad Dash is an Xbox launch title.

Eidos' third new character-focused game is Herdy Gerdy, currently in development by Core Design, the studio who created Lara Croft. Gerdy is an apprentice herder who embarks on a quest to save his father by restoring order to his island and its inhabitants. This marathon adventure features one of the most unique experiences available on the PlayStation 2. The gameplay of Herdy Gerdy encompasses exploration, platform, strategy and puzzle elements. These dynamics are integrated within a vibrant world that features a delicately balanced eco-system, which the player will manipulate in order to save Gerdy's father. Herdy Gerdy will be available this Winter.

In addition to the aforementioned titles, following are some highlights gamers can look forward to seeing on the E3 show floor at the Eidos booth (No.1024, South Hall):

- * **Commandos 2: Men of Courage:** Pyro Studios is the developer of this tactical strategy/action game set against the backdrop of World War II for the PC, the Sega Dreamcast and the PlayStation 2. From the heart of the Third Reich to the most remote islands in the South Pacific, Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite group of commandos must utilize their combined expertise as they venture deep into enemy territory and attempt to change the course of the war. Ship date: Fall 2001.
- * **Project Eden:** Due to severe overpopulation, the planet Earth's diameter is increasing with the growth of towering megacities, each inhabited by millions of humans. Descending thousands of feet, conditions steadily decline to slum level. In this action/adventure game for the PC and PlayStation 2, gamers will lead a rescue team into the depths to investigate the disappearance of a technical crew sent to repair malfunctioning machinery at the 'Real Meat' factory. Ship date: PC -- Fall 2001, PlayStation 2 -- Fall 2001
- * **Soul Reaver 2:** Soul Reaver 2 is an action/adventure game for the PlayStation 2 created by Crystal Dynamics. Gamers join Raziel as he emerges from the chronoplast time portal, and returns to different eras of Nosgoth's past. In his journey, he unearths the mysteries of Nosgoth's ancient races, and exposes the secrets behind the corruption of the pillars and the vampire genocide. Ship date: Fall 2001
- * **Trade Empires:** Created by Frog City Software, this strategy game is for the PC. Beginning at the dawn of human civilization and progressing through the 19th century, Trade Empires is an episodic, transport and trade simulation about creating a profitable merchant empire through trade. Ship date: Fall 2001
- * **ThunderStrike: Operation Phoenix:** Core Design's arcade/action game is for the PlayStation 2 puts gamers in the pilot's seat of a highly advanced and artillery-laden gun-ship. A deadly wave of extremist terrorism has struck at all the principal nations, paralyzing the world with fear. The globe's major powers immediately issue a state of emergency, merging their weapons resources and technologies into a clandestine project entitled Operation Phoenix. In controls of the most advance gunship technology known to man, you're the best shot the free world has for peace. Ship date: Winter 2001
- * **Wave Rally:** In this action sports game for the PlayStation 2, gamers experience the thrill of competitive personal watercraft racing as they launch off realistic crashing waves, speed over jump ramps and perform spectacular freestyle tricks. Ship date: Winter 2001
- * **Praetorians:** Currently in development by Pyro Studios, Praetorians is a troop-based strategy game for the PC set in the time of the Roman Empire. Gamers utilize strong strategic skills, take command of the Roman Army and complete three campaigns across Gaul, Egypt and Rome in an attempt to forge the Roman Empire and become Emperor. Ship date: Spring 2002
- * **Republic:** Developed by Elixir Studios, Republic is a PC strategy game in which the gamer plays the role of a faction leader intent on becoming the president...by fair means or foul. Starting with a single loyal supporter, a tiny secret headquarters and a very small base of local support, the player must build up a nationwide party powerful enough to oust the president. Ship date: Spring 2000

XBOX, Playstation 2 and Dreamcast

XGAMING, INC will be debuting the highly anticipated X-Arcade at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.

The X-Arcade is the world's first multi-platform gaming device using XGAMING Inc's patent pending X-PORT technology, which allows any X-PORT enabled device to be used with any system, including Playstation 1, 2, Sega Dreamcast, PC, MAC, XBOX, GAMECUBE and Nintendo 64.

The technology is receiving industry wide recognition as the first attempt to unify gaming systems under one standard of input control, so video game players can use one device across a multitude of systems.

The X-Arcade is a two player, arcade replica controller, with 20 buttons, side pinball buttons, hand constructed of wood and authentic arcade parts. The device allows two players to replicate the arcade gaming experience at home on any gaming system, with the purchase of separate gaming system adapters.

"The X-Arcade is targeted at arcade, sports and fighting game fans, and the online response to this product is absolutely staggering," said Marketing manager Jeremiah Kopchek. "We never imagined the product would be so well received, but we are excited for the show to finally show customers how well the product works."

Capcom, a world leader in video game publishing, will be using the X Arcade in it's booth at E3 to demonstrate it's new Playstation 2 and Dreamcast releases for this fall. The product will also be featured at XGAMING, INC's booth in Kenita Hall. The X-Arcade is back-ordered in the USA until July 1, 2001, but the company is taking reserve orders at www.xgaming.com.

EA Signs Publishing Agreement With Fox Interactive Bringing the Simpsons, Buffy and Aliens to Next Generation Video Game Systems

EA To Showcase FOX Titles for the Xbox and PlayStation 2 at Electronic Entertainment Expo

The Simpsons, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Aliens join The Sims, EA SPORTS and James Bond with a multi-year, worldwide, co-publishing deal that Electronic Arts and Fox Interactive have signed. EA will unveil Aliens: Colonial Marines for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, and The Simpsons Road Rage for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft next week at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). The agreement also includes publishing Buffy the Vampire Slayer on the Xbox. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"EA is pleased to extend our current publishing relationship with Fox Interactive to a worldwide scale and have such pop culture icons as The Simpsons, Aliens and Buffy the Vampire Slayer under our publishing umbrella," said Tom Frisina, Electronic Arts Vice President of Distribution. "We look forward to leveraging our global distribution strength to maximize exposure for these quality titles."

"We are thrilled to have EA's publishing muscle behind the titles we're

bringing to the next generation consoles," said Steven Bersch, Fox Interactive President. "EA has an established track record publishing Fox Interactive titles throughout Europe and with this deal, our partnership will continue and we can work together to bring great Fox franchises to gamers all over the world. This agreement is a key partnership for Fox Interactive in our new co-publishing business."

Aliens: Colonial Marines, which will be released this fall on the PlayStation 2 console, is a first-person squad-based game that continues the legacy of horrifyingly suspenseful games based on the Alien film franchise. The player controls a squad of well-equipped United States Colonial Marines as they investigate the disappearance of their comrades. Additionally, Colonial Marines will be followed by another original Aliens title for next generation systems.

The Simpsons Road Rage is an action racing title with a full Simpsons storyline. Set in the town of Springfield, this new game blends renowned Simpsons wit with edge-of-your seat racing to create a fun, reckless and riotously funny arcade-style racing game. The title is slated to ship this fall on both the PlayStation 2 console and Xbox. Road Rage will be followed by another Simpsons title in 2002 for the PlayStation 2 console.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a single-player, third-person action horror game based on the international hit television series. Players take on the role of Buffy Summers, a typical high school student by day and a fierce destroyer of the undead by night. Buffy the Vampire Slayer combines fighting, action, humor and exploration in a complex interactive 3D environment. The game also features characters and plots based on the TV show's third season. The game is slated to ship on Xbox in 2002.

Interplay Announces Rubu Tribe for PlayStation

Digital Mayhem, a division of Interplay Entertainment Corp., proudly announced that Rubu Tribe is currently in development for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Rubu Tribe is an exciting, unique and imaginative adventure game that combines the best elements of exploration, strategy and action. Developed by Outrage Entertainment, Inc., and exclusively licensed and distributed by Interplay, Rubu Tribe is scheduled to ship Q4, 2001, for the PlayStation 2.

"We're passionate about creating a truly rich experience with Rubu Tribe," stated Travis Williams, Senior Producer, Interplay Entertainment Corp. "Rubu Tribe is a game that successfully combines great characters and story with compelling gameplay."

In Rubu Tribe, gamers control the leader of a tribe of creatures known as the Rubu. Having built their village on the back of a gargantuan beast called the Uut, the tribe embarks on a journey to a sacred and mystical place. As the tribal leader, players control the actions of their character while directing those of their fellow tribe members. The player must lead the journey safely through a dangerous organic world while caring for the Uut, exploring the environment and keeping the tribe happy; all while facing challenges from both outside and inside the tribe.

Takes the Field For Another PlayStation Season

PlayStation Game Console's Most Popular Baseball Franchise Brings on the Major League's Best

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced that MLB 2002 from the 989 Sports development team is now available in stores, marking the availability of the latest installment of the popular MLB franchise. MLB 2002 couples the ultimate in gameplay control with Artificial Intelligence (AI) consultation by professional players and the most updated rosters and stadiums. With eight modes of gameplay, MLB 2002 offers fans the ability to play through the rigors of a full-length season with Season Mode, jump straight into Play Offs or the World Series or even assume the role of general manager and guide a team in pursuit of the pennant over multiple seasons with Franchise Mode. All-new camera angles and commentary by Hall of Fame announcer Vin Scully and color analyst Dave Campbell combine to make MLB 2002 the most authentic telecast available for a PlayStation game console baseball game.

With input from nearly 20 MLB players, MLB 2002 features more than 300 Major League motion-captured animations with 250 personalized moves ranging from Randy Johnson's nasty 3/4 delivery to El Duke's unmistakable leg kick. Players are closely modeled after their real-life counterparts, including details such as facial hair, and consumers can play at stadiums across the country, such as the brand-new PNC Park in Pittsburgh.

"MLB 2002 provides the most realistic baseball game available for PlayStation," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "The 989 Sports team has combined the classic elements of its previous release with new features that really give the player a first-hand experience of what it is like to take a team all the way to the World Series."

The 989 Sports development team sought professional consultation from some of the biggest names in the game to make MLB 2002 the most realistic baseball game on PlayStation. Batting AI was designed with the help of the newest member of the 3000 hit club, Tony Gwynn, while pitching AI was improved with input from one of the most feared relievers on the mound, Trevor Hoffman. Consultation with top MLB managers helped fine-tune defensive and strategic AI.

MLB All-Star and Atlanta Braves' outfielder Andruw Jones stars on the package front of the game.

MLB 2002 for PlayStation Key Features:

- Ultimate Control Gameplay - Control is key to success. With Total Control Fielding, fielders dive, throw from their knees, crow-hop, twirl throw, throw on the run, and make barehanded grabs. The best batting interface in all of baseball videogames, Total Control Batting, is enhanced with an eight-zone location selector.
- TV-Style Presentation - Along with more commentary from the two-man booth of Hall of Fame announcer Vin Scully and color analyst Dave Campbell, all new camera angles provide the most authentic telecast available for a PlayStation baseball game.
- Professionally Consulted AI - Featuring batting AI designed with the newest member of Baseball 3000 hit club, Tony Gwynn and pitching AI improved with input from the top hurlers in the game including one of the most feared relievers in the game today, Trevor Hoffman.

- Stadium Graphics - Play at the brand new PNC Park in Pittsburgh or one of the newer stadiums in the league including: Safeco Field in Seattle, Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco and Comerica Park in Detroit.
- Player Models & Animations - More than 300 authentic Major League motion-captured animations with 250 personalized moves.
- Multiple Gameplay Modes - Eight different modes lets gamers participate in every aspect of MLB baseball. Modes include Exhibition, Spring Training, Season, All-Star Game, Playoffs, World Series, Home Run Derby and Franchise.
- Authentic MLB Trophies - Bring home some recognition, including the Cy Young, Batting Title, MVP Award or even the World Series.
- Compatible with PS one console, PlayStation game console and PlayStation2 computer entertainment system.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates MLB 2002 "E" for "Everyone."

Interplay Announces Star Trek: Shattered Universe for the PlayStation2; Interplay's Final Star Trek Game Showcases the Alternate Star Trek Universe

Interplay Entertainment Corp. proudly announced that their final Star Trek game, Star Trek: Shattered Universe, is currently in development for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Star Trek: Shattered Universe is a space based action-shooter that takes place in the dark alternative universe to the classic Star Trek setting. Based on the story elements first revealed in the original Star Trek series episode, "Mirror, Mirror", the game takes place in the time just after the events portrayed in "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country." In the game, the USS Excelsior, under the command of Captain Sulu, is stranded in the "Mirror Universe" with a new mission, to find a way home. Star Trek: Shattered Universe is scheduled to ship for the PlayStation 2 in Q4, 2001.

Developed by Starsphere Interactive, Inc., Star Trek: Shattered Universe will allow gamers to embark on a different kind of Star Trek adventure, a dark voyage across hostile territories encountering an array of alien races (Klingons, Romulans, Vulcans, Tholians, and Gorn) and artifacts including the "Guardian of Forever" (an ancient time portal) and "The Doomsday Machine" (a giant robot ship that consumes planets for fuel). Piloting a series of agile single pilot ships, players will engage swarms of enemy fighters, and fleets of capital ships in a variety of space environments. Stranded in this hostile universe, the player must aide the Excelsior and seek out vital resources in order to survive and return to the normal universe. Players can gain additional fighters and technologies through alliances or through defeating attacking ships. The newly acquired technology can then be used to upgrade their fighter with more powerful weapons and shields including some exotic alien devices like the Romulan cloaking device.

Shrek Makes His Mark on Game Boy Color

DreamWorks' Heroic Green Ogre, Shrek, Ventures
From the Big Screen to the Smallest

TDK Mediactive, Inc. shipped Shrek Fairy Tale FreakDown for Game Boy Color. Shrek, the computer animated comedy from DreamWorks Pictures opens in theaters nationwide on May 18, 2001.

“Shrek is such a humorous and multifaceted character. His attitude and strength are both qualities that make him a great character for interactive games,” said Vincent Bitetti, chief executive officer of TDK Mediactive. “We feel that Shrek will be a terrific new loveable character for kids of all ages, and are thrilled to provide fans a new way to experience Shrek through the Game Boy Color platform.”

Shrek for Game Boy Color takes players on a no holds barred, irreverent comical fighting adventure as characters from the movie duke it out for the title of “Ultimate Champion.” Players can compete as Shrek or as one of several well-known fairy tale characters, including Pinocchio, the Gingerbread Man, and the Big Bad Wolf.

This tongue-in-cheek game features:

- * 3 difficulty levels (easy, medium and hard), as well as a training mode
- * 9 arenas
- * 6 characters to play immediately, 3 to unlock and play
- * Unique fighting moves, including farts and bad breath

Shrek Fairy Tale FreakDown for Game Boy Color is the first game to be released under TDK Mediactive’s 5-year, worldwide licensing agreement with DreamWorks SKG. The next Shrek game will be released for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft in Fall 2001. For more information on Shrek FairyTale FreakDown, please visit TDK Mediactive’s website at www.tdk-mediactive.com.

TDK Mediactive will be showcasing Shrek Fairy Tale FreakDown and Shrek for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft at the upcoming Electronic Entertainment Expo 2001 in Los Angeles, starting May 17, 2001 at booth No. 966 in the South Hall.

About Shrek

Once upon a time, in a far away swamp, there lived an ornery ogre named Shrek whose precious solitude is suddenly shattered by an invasion of annoying fairy tale characters. There are blind mice in his food, a big bad wolf in his bed, three little homeless pigs and more, all banished from their kingdom by the evil Lord Farquaad.

Determined to save their home - not to mention his own - Shrek cuts a deal with Farquaad and sets out to rescue the beautiful Princess Fiona to be Farquaad’s bride. Accompanying him on his mission is a wisecracking Donkey, who will do anything for Shrek...except shut up. Rescuing the Princess from a fire-breathing dragon may prove the least of their problems when the deep, dark secret she has been keeping is revealed.

Shrek is based on the children’s book by William Steig.

Long considered the squeakiest of squeaky-clean game publishers, Nintendo is venturing into unknown territory with its ribald release of Conker's Bad Fur Day for the Nintendo 64.

CONKER the squirrel, the title character in a new Nintendo game, is having a terrible day or, as he puts it, a bad fur day. It all began with a few too many drinks at the local saloon. After throwing up outside the bar, Conker heads through the darkness until he comes to a sign that points in two directions, Naughty and Nice. "Emmm," Conker slurs, teetering down the Naughty path, "this way, I suppose."

Can this really be Nintendo? Long considered the squeakiest of squeaky-clean game publishers, the company is venturing into unknown territory with its ribald release for the Nintendo 64, Conker's Bad Fur Day.

The game, developed in Britain and released in March, is filled with plenty of naughty and vulgar bits as Conker tries to fight his way through a hangover and find his way home. Players encounter an enemy made of feces, a bunny doing aerobics in hot pants and the evisceration of the very same kind of small furry animals one would usually find smiling in the shrubs in a Mario adventure.

Games like Conker's Bad Fur Day, which is rated Mature by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, the industry's self-regulatory body, reflect maturing demographics. Long considered the domain of young boys, the \$7 billion-a-year video game business now attracts an increasingly diverse audience, not just children.

A study conducted last year by Peter D. Hart Research Associates estimates that of the 145 million Americans who play electronic games, a majority are older than 18. Among these are many adults in their 30's who grew up with Pong, the Atari 2600 and other early game consoles and still like to play games.

"The industry has changed significantly," said Dr. Arthur Pober, president of the ratings board. "Video games conjure up the image of little kids. The reality is, it's not that at all."

Older gamers, however, don't necessarily mean more risqu games. Many adult players prefer the same kind of teenager-friendly sports and adventure titles as their younger counterparts. And others play classic board and card games like Scrabble and bridge online.

But the niche of Mature titles is beginning to show signs of growth. While most of the Mature ratings (which the board gives to games deemed to have "content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older") have gone to ultraviolent shoot-'em-up games, new titles like Conker's Bad Fur Day and Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix, for the Sony PlayStation, are paving the way for other kinds of adult-oriented content, with things like explicit gross-out humor and heavy sexual innuendo.

In the past, games that have headed down that path have hardly been mainstream. The Leisure Suit Larry series turned players into hapless casanovas on a crass mission for sex. A game called Custer's Revenge, released in 1982, depicted a naked General Custer raping an American Indian woman tied to a stake, and most retailers refused to carry it.

But the new wave of sexually oriented games represents a major shift because major players like Nintendo and Sony are taking the plunge.

For Nintendo, the decision to go down the naughty road comes after years when it seemed to go out of its way to avoid offending gamers (or their parents). The company was among the first to set stringent guidelines for child-friendly gaming, like changing blood color from red to green or, more curiously, in Wolfenstein 3D, substituting rats for guard dogs as shooting targets.

Perrin Kaplan, vice president of corporate affairs for Nintendo, said there was a feeling within the company that it had to do more for its gamers as they grew older.

"One of the things Nintendo has been criticized for is just being a kiddy system," she said. "People who fell in love with Mario at the age of 6 are now in their 30's. They have expectations of Nintendo that we have not met."

The green light for Conker's Bad Fur Day came in great part, Ms. Kaplan said, because of the reputation of the game's developer, a reclusive and idiosyncratic company called Rare that was started by two brothers in the English countryside. From its office near the village of Twycross, Rare has churned out some of Nintendo's biggest hits in recent years, including two acclaimed M-rated shoot-'em-up games, GoldenEye and Perfect Dark, as well as the E-rated (for everyone) Donkey Kong Country and Banjo-Kazooie.

The character of Conker had already had a bit part in earlier games when Rare brought up the idea of a starring vehicle for the puckish squirrel. The developers wanted to use him as, essentially, a personification of the adult gamer.

"I think the best way to view Conker with respect to his earlier incarnations is that like people, he's changed and matured or become more cynical with age," an unnamed developer from Rare (they prefer anonymity) told Amazon.com in an uncustomary interview earlier this year. Rare officials declined to be interviewed for this article.

"Nintendo initially had concerns regarding this issue," the developer added, "because kids might confuse the product as being aimed at them, but I'm sure you'll agree if you've seen the box that Nintendo is making sure nobody makes that mistake."

The marketing campaign for the product has been aggressive in that regard. Rather than placing ads aimed at the younger readers of some gaming magazines, the company has placed ads in men's magazines like Maxim and has run commercials on cable television programs like "The Man Show." They have even distributed a line of Conker coasters for bars.

Despite the adult-oriented advertising, "this isn't an adult game," Ms. Kaplan said. "It's mature comic mischief."

Some gamers haven't seemed to care too much one way or the other. Reviews of Conker's Bad Fur Day have generally been favorable, and reviewers have cited the entertaining and challenging game play more than the tasteless gags.

But Nintendo's diligence about making the distinction between Adult and Mature games is well founded. Few game makers want any of their products to be labeled with what has become the industry's equivalent of a scarlet A: the ratings board's Adults Only rating. Games garner this rating if they contain "graphic depictions of sex and/or violence," according to the

ratings board. Any game with such a rating is considered not viable in the mainstream marketplace.

Of the more than 7,000 games rated by the board since it was founded in 1994, only 12 are listed on the board's Web site (www.esrb.org) under the Adults Only category. Most of those are described as having "strong sexual content."

Though mainstream game makers are comfortable depicting violence, they tend to shy away from sex. Most don't stray past the voluptuous pixels of a Lara Croft, the protagonist of the Tomb Raider games, or the blurred pixels used to cover a bather in The Sims, a simulation game. "We could have shown the Sims naked," said the game's creator, Will Wright, "but I think it's effective to leave more to the imagination."

Last year an M-rated game called Panty Raider left little at all to the imagination. In the game, players were on a mission from space aliens to take pictures of cartoon supermodels clad only in underwear.

In recent months, ads for the new Sony PlayStation game Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix, an M-rated action adventure starring two female mercenaries, seemed to suggest strong sexual content. One ad showed one of the women lying in her underwear while the other woman, similarly undressed, straddled her back and gave her a massage.

But despite some suggestive dialogue (and a kiss), the game is much more about suspense and adventure than it is about sex. Stan Liu, president and chief executive of Kronos Digital Entertainment, the game's developer, said it was the choice of the publisher, Eidos, to market the game in a soft-porn manner. "I didn't mind the ads at first," Mr. Liu said, "but I wish they would have followed up with real ads about what the game is about."

Mr. Liu is concerned about games that pander when trying to reach an adult audience. "A lot of so-called mature games are even more childish than games meant for children," he said. Speaking of the developers of Conker's Bad Fur Day, he added: "Their concept of maturity is that they use foul language and the squirrel does tasteless things. For me, that's not adult, that's immature."

Or, as Conker might argue, mature comic mischief.

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Portable Atari 2600 Done

One man with a vision brings the software of the Atari 2600 to a handheld.

Ben Heckendorn's dream of producing a portable Atari 2600 began during a night of hard drinking. "On New Year's Eve 1999, we were wandering around

State Street in Madison, Wis., getting ready for 'the super bowl of drinking' as well call it, and we came across this old game store. I noticed all these rare games and thought, 'Wow, there is still interest with this stuff,'" he stated. Heckendorn, an admitted mad scientist, took the inspiration and ran with it. "At the time I didn't have a project going, so I started doodling one day and came up with the idea of a portable Atari 2600," he explained. Heckendorn worked on the original VCSp (short for the Atari 2600's original name, Video Computer System) from February to April of 2000, but then took a break from the project. "I can still recall over the Fourth of July last year. I was sitting at this bar and I said to my friend, 'You know, I sure had a lot of fun building that Atari...(glug glug).'

Heckendorn's ideas gestated for six months before he resumed work on the project with the goal of creating a unit that had possibilities for mass production. Currently, Heckendorn is producing the units himself using old Atari 2600 consoles and portable televisions. But in some ways, the VCSp is superior to mass-produced handhelds. "The screen is backlit. It's actually a small portable RCA TV. The current models of VCSp's take a Sony Infolithium rechargeable battery--the same kind digital cameras use. The average battery will last around 2 hours, which is certainly not as long as the Game Boy Advance. But it's a different market. Also, there's a power in-jack so you can run it off wall power. Future models may take AA batteries, but right now rechargeable batteries are the most economic until I lower the power consumption," he explained.

The VCSp has a 1.5-inch screen and utilizes the speaker from an RCA portable television, making for a aural experience that is much better than that of most handheld machines. Heckendorn claims that 95 percent of Atari 2600 software runs fine on his invention, with the few exceptions being games that utilized television programming tricks to get more out of the aging 2600 hardware. The VCSp also includes an extra controller port for head-to-head play, a hidden battery compartment, and an audio-video out-jack.

Until the VCSp goes into assembly-line production, it will cost \$248.79 for a special order. If you trade in an old Atari 2600, the price drops by \$40. If Heckendorn can seal a deal for re-manufactured screens, the price could drop even further. As it stands now, each unit takes several days for Heckendorn to produce. "If I get some custom PCB's made, cheaper screens, and molded cases, I believe that I could move up to squirrel speed. I've had some interest in it [being mass produced], but at the moment I'm still on my own," he stated.

For a portable system barely out of the starting gate, the VCSp already has an impressive software library of more than 1000 games. There were some initial legal issues with the units when they were adorned with the Atari logo, but now that it has been removed, Heckendorn is able to sell his product with no legal ramifications. The portable VCSp has yet to receive a final name, but Heckendorn is playing around the name Vagabond.

Currently, the VCSp is a great idea in the hands of just one man. Until Heckendorn can find a company that is willing to get the VCSp into production, he will have to rely on the gaming community to perpetuate his dream. "Anyone that can help with three big issues (cheap screens, custom circuit boards, and molded cases) is welcome to drop me a line and lend any info they can," he stated. "Is there anyone out there with stockpiles of Atari 2600 TIA chips? They're hard to find and I might need a bunch."

To order your own VCSp or to contact Ben Heckendorn, click here
[<http://www.classicgaming.com/vcsp/>] to check out his official VCSp Web
site.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Price War Has PC Makers Fighting

Big rebates. Free printers. Promotions everywhere.

Consumers are now benefitting from a brutal price war as personal computer makers try to stimulate demand - and stay alive.

The economic slowdown has tightened the screws on a saturated market, leading in 2001's first quarter to the industry's first-ever U.S. revenue decline.

Aggressive pricing by market leader Dell Computer Corp. has forced smaller PC makers to bow out or scale back. And analysts say continued pressure from Dell could trigger more consolidation.

"This has been Dell's strategy from the beginning. It's just working better now," said Roger Kay, analyst with International Data Corp.
"Inevitably, some will get strangled and leave."

Micron Electronics Inc. had \$1 billion in PC sales in fiscal 2000. But the price war proved too tough: On Tuesday, it sold its PC business to Gores Technology Group, a private investment group.

Micron chairman Joel J. Kocher said it was better to exit rapidly, cut losses and focus the Nampa, Idaho-based company on its growing Web hosting business.

"With growth rates in the PC industry plunging - dropping more than six percent in the fourth quarter alone - and price wars by major competitors significantly reducing gross margins, the PC business is becoming a major drain on the company's cash reserves," he said.

From October to March, overall prices of mainstream computers sold by major U.S. vendors dropped by 22 percent, according to computer researcher IDEAS International.

Prices by Dell, whose 24 percent share of U.S. sales is almost double that of second-place Compaq Computer Corp., were sliced by more than 30 percent. Dell's products were still 23 percent cheaper than the industry average.

Round Rock, Texas-based Dell, which has steadily gained market share with its direct-order business model, shows no signs of relenting.

The 1.7-gigahertz Pentium 4 processor debuted in computers just two weeks ago. By Monday, Dell had already dropped its introductory price by 20 percent - to \$1,349 - for Dimension desktops featuring the fastest available PC chip.

Today's aggressive promotions and price cuts - \$400 dollar instant rebates, free shipping, free printers and free Internet access abound - come after steady long-term price drops, in part due to cheaper components.

The average retail price for desktop PCs was \$880 in February, compared to \$1,700 in 1996, according to NPD Intellect.

The brains of PCs - processors - are at bargain-basement prices. Chipmakers Intel Corp. and Advanced Micro Devices Inc., engaged in their own battle, have repeatedly slashed prices.

Intel's new 1.7 gigahertz Pentium 4 chip started at a bulk price of \$352 when it debuted last month. By comparison, when Intel introduced its 1.1-GHz Pentium III last July, it sold for a hefty \$990.

Prices of memory modules, hard drives and modems are also at all-time lows. Many features, such as video cards and sound cards, are being integrated into computer motherboards, so PC manufacturers need not purchase them separately at higher prices.

As a result, computers are also gaining in performance, said Steve Baker, analyst with NPD Intellect.

For instance, Hewlett-Packard Co.'s Pavilion desktops with 128 megabytes of RAM, a CD-rewritable drive, a 15-inch monitor and 20-gigabyte hard drive start at \$699 today, including AOL service. Several months ago, consumers would have paid that price for a model with only half the memory and without the CD-RW drive, Baker said.

"What you're getting for your money now is mind-boggling," said Mark N. Vena, director for consumer desktops at Compaq's Home and Office Division.

Compaq's high-end home computer with a 1.1 gigahertz processor, movie-editing software, DVD recorder and five free Electronics Arts games, now sells for \$2,000. That's \$500 less than what it cost in January, said Vena.

Slashing prices wins customers, but it also translates to lower profit margins. PC makers are reeling from declining revenue: Compaq, HP, Gateway Inc. and Dell all have announced layoffs this year.

Some companies have offered big product promotions, but have not matched Dell's steep price cuts.

"We're approaching the PC market on the basis of pursuing profitability versus share growth," Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina told analysts in April. "There simply isn't the back-end recurring revenue stream in this business that warrants sacrificing product profits."

Without middlemen or channel distributors, analysts say Dell has the upper hand. It is able to save on supply chain expenses and efficiently pass on cost savings to its customers.

"Dell has an hour of oxygen and others have a half-hour," said Andy Neff,

an analyst at Bear Stearns. "And Dell's agenda is to convince everyone they shouldn't even go in the water."

In the meantime, consumers can expect more good deals.

"Everyone has accepted that automobiles get more expensive when they gain more features, but the computer industry has set the opposite expectation," Kay said. "They say, 'Next year, it'll be faster, better, and cheaper.' It's the devil's bargain."

CD Burning Company Roxio to Step Out on Its Own

Roxio Inc., a maker of CD-burning software, will be spun off from data storage firm Adaptec Inc. next week and hopes to become as well known to music fans as Elvis, or even Napster.

The little-known company is a leading provider of digital media software to personal computer giants like Dell Computer Corp., Hewlett-Packard Co. and Gateway Inc.

People use the software, which is bundled on many PCs, to record audio, video, photos and other data from the Internet onto compact discs.

Roxio's CD-burning software, Easy CD Creator for Windows and Toast for Macintosh computers, is the best-selling software of its kind. It was bundled with about 24 million CD recorders in 2000 alone, accounting for about 70 percent of the entire CD recorder market that year.

Analysts say there are expected to be 100 million CD recorders in use worldwide by the end of this year and 400 million by 2004.

Roxio is now hoping to go mainstream with a huge magazine promotion in coming weeks, according to Chris Gorog, chief executive officer of Milpitas, Calif.-based Roxio.

"We're an anomaly in Silicon Valley. We've been highly profitable since 1998 and we're growing at a 100 percent rate," said Gorog. "But nobody knows who we are."

Analysts agree that consumer awareness is one of the challenges for the company.

"It's always a challenge for a software company to make it as a standalone without the umbilical chord to the parent company, but they are in a hot space with viable markets to target," said P.J. McNealy, senior research analyst with Gartner.

"Roxio has the task of transforming itself into more of a customer-facing company. They are known by high-tech early adopters, but now they're going for a more mainstream audience," McNealy said.

Roxio will be spun off to Adaptec shareholders on May 11 and begins trading on the Nasdaq stock market starting May 14, under the ticker symbol ROXI.

Gorog said Roxio's sales rose to nearly \$120 million for fiscal 2001, which ended March 31, from \$13.3 million in fiscal 1996. In fiscal 2001 it had a pro forma, pretax margin of over 20 percent.

About 60 percent of Roxio's business comes from its partnerships with major PC makers with the remaining 40 percent derived from retail sales. He said a slowdown in PC sales will not severely hurt the company due to increasing recordable CD drive adoption.

"Notwithstanding the PC slowdown, anybody who is buying a computer is still buying one with CD burning software," he said.

Roxio's business has grown as the blank compact disk market has exploded, and as people have increasingly created their own CDs. Blank compact disk production has soared, with about 4 billion blank CDs shipped in 2000.

Nevertheless, analysts said Roxio needs to expand into video applications to sustain its growth.

Gorog said Roxio was poised to expand in the video recording market.

"In the next four to six weeks, we'll be making a big announcement on Roxio's entry into DVD recording," said Gorog.

Roxio's recording software is included in Microsoft's Windows Media Player 7 and RealNetworks' RealJukebox, software players which let users play music or view videos on a PC.

Gorog said popular song-swap service Napster, which is currently struggling to comply with a crippling court order, has been a huge driver for Roxio's business this past year.

Analysts said Roxio would be best served by aligning itself with major recording companies as usage on Napster dwindles under the weight of court restrictions.

Gorog said Roxio is also the "CD burning solution" for MusicNet, a music subscription joint venture between RealNetworks Inc. and three major music companies, Warner Music, EMI Group Plc and Bertelsmann AG's BMG, which is expected to begin testing in late summer or early fall.

Gorog said Microsoft Corp. will embed Roxio's CD-burning software in its next PC operating system, Windows XP, due out later this year.

Napster To Use Acoustic 'Fingerprints'

In the latest version of its MP3 file-swapping application, Napster has incorporated acoustic fingerprinting technology that will eventually allow Napster to prevent songs from being traded by identifying them based on their unique audio properties.

Napster announced that it licensed the acoustic fingerprinting technology, known as TRM for "This Recognizes Music", from Virginia-based Relatable at the end of April.

A notice posted on Napster's Web site informs users that the technology is part of Napster 2.0 beta 10, which users must download from the Napster site.

According to Napster, an acoustic fingerprint is a small amount of data

that represents the unique sound recording of a file.

Using complex algorithms, different files can be identified as the same song by matching the acoustic fingerprint of the file being swapped with the fingerprint in an existing database.

With the Beta 10 version of Napster's software, the Napster server will randomly request that Napster applications generate fingerprints of MP3 files being shared and send them to the Napster server.

Napster will store fingerprint data along with other identifying information about the file, allowing the company to build a database "to identify files, and more accurately block those files that rights-holders have asked us to exclude from the Napster Community," according to documents posted on its Web site.

Napster has been under a court order since March 5th to prevent its users from swapping copyright-protected songs on a list provided by record companies.

The task has been complicated by the fact that Napster users do not uniformly name their files in a way that can be easily detected by Napster's text-based filters.

In addition, many users have gone out of their way to circumvent Napster's filtering efforts by using codes, Pig Latin and other tricks.

Napster will not be able to collect acoustic samples from users who do not download the latest Napster release, but for now, users of older versions of Napster will still be allowed access to the Napster system.

Napster's goal is to employ the fingerprinting technology to block access when it launches its subscription service this summer, and it may use it before then, a Napster spokesperson told NewsFactor Network.

"[Relatable's technology] will help ensure that the millions of music files transferred through the new Napster system will be accurately monitored, and it will enable the appropriate allocation of royalties to artists, music publishers and record companies," said Pat Breslin, CEO of Relatable, in a statement.

"TRM delivers unprecedented speed and can effectively scale to handle the volume of the Napster system," added Breslin.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which represents the five major record labels that sued Napster to block free access to the copyrighted songs, has asked the judge in the case to punish Napster for what it sees as Napster's inadequate filtering efforts thus far.

Last week, Judge Marilyn Hall Patel declined to take any further action, instead waiting for a report from a "neutral" technology adviser who is studying the filtering issue.

Meanwhile, recent statistics released by digital entertainment research company Webnoize indicate that though about 80 percent of Napsters files are being blocked, as many as 8 million people still use the service each day.

Watching Aimster's "Private" Network

An anti-piracy company has begun shining a light on people trading music files through the Aimster file-swapping network, a Napster-like service that promises privacy features that theoretically place it beyond the reach of copyright police.

MediaForce, one of several companies that tracks people trading files through Napster, Gnutella and other similar services, announced Thursday that it had found a way to find copyrighted works by evading the encrypted network--exposing a serious hole in Aimster's claims to privacy.

The New York-based company's terms of service bar anyone using the network to spy on its members. It also argues that attempts track use on its service violate digital copyright law's ban on subverting cryptography schemes.

MediaForce's approach isn't particularly complicated--it's simply running searches on Aimster's network using the company's own software and taking down the results.

The outcome of these searches, and Aimster's attempts to have them deemed illegal, could go a long way toward shaping the future of online file-swapping as people look for an alternative to Napster.

"What's been unique is that Aimster has billed itself as an encrypted private network," said MediaForce CEO Aaron Kessler. "But we haven't broken their encryption or reverse engineered their software at all."

From its beginning, Aimster has offered a different kind of file-swapping system than the huge, anonymous networks run by Napster or iMesh. The company's software draws from the buddy lists on AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) to create its own lists of trusted friends. Files don't get traded through the AIM network, but people who transfer their buddy lists to Aimster can offer files to and download files solely from the few people on their buddy lists.

But a month or so ago, the company began offering another service where people can open their hard drives to anyone, much like Napster. Aimster says this service is solely for finding buddies with similar interests--a person searching for "Metallica" would be able to see who else likes Metallica and then add those people to a buddy list, for example.

The effect has turned the service into something similar to Napster, where people can search tens of thousands of hard drives simultaneously without a buddy list system.

It's this feature that MediaForce is tapping into. Aimster's original buddy system is still secure. But as soon as Aimster users reach into the wider network in search of a larger number of files, they open themselves to monitoring by MediaForce or anyone else that chooses to look.

The outstanding question--one that will help determine the fate of file-swapping--is whether MediaForce is doing anything wrong by taking down names. Like other companies including Media Enforcer, it acts on behalf of music publishers and record labels, contacting Napster and Internet service providers to point out specific people who are trading copyrighted music.

Aimster has noted in its terms of service that people can't use the software to spy on each other.

"You will at all times herein refrain from tracking, monitoring, surveying, eavesdropping or collecting information on the activities of other users," the company's terms of service reads. "For any single breach of the terms of this paragraph you agree to pay...a lump sum of \$1 million."

But the company is also making a more ambitious argument. Because it has encrypted its network and deems people's files--and its own software--to be copyrighted or potentially copyrighted material, anything that breaks that encryption is a violation of federal copyright law, the company says.

That argument attempts to turn the copyright holders' most potent weapon back on themselves. The federal Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) does make it illegal to distribute or use tools that are explicitly designed for circumventing technology that protects copyright.

Previously, Aimster has said that breaking the encryption on its network to spy on its users would violate this copyright law. It's even gone to court seeking approval for its service, arguing that record companies are trying to stop trades of completely legal files and instant messages.

Now it's saying that MediaForce is going too far by taking down information that is freely available to anyone that turns on the Aimster software. The monitoring company is using the software--which automatically decodes the network's transmissions--for unauthorized purposes and is therefore breaking copyright law, Aimster says.

"We would say there is a pretty strong case that they are taking a risk under federal law," said Johnny Deep, an Aimster spokesman. "It's as if they had hacked in and found the decryption key and were using it for unauthorized purposes."

This untested interpretation of federal copyright law could help set the rules for file-swappers and copyright police. Aimster has yet to act against MediaForce but is threatening legal action.

"We'll let them keep hanging themselves in the press and then go to the attorney general with the articles," Deep said.

Microsoft to Launch New Windows in October

Microsoft said on Wednesday it will launch the newest version of its Windows computer operating system on Oct. 25, delivering the software in time for the crucial holiday shopping season but missing the back-to-school rush that is another big computer-buying season.

The world's No. 1 software company had previously said the product, called Windows XP, would go on sale in the second half of the year.

The launch date was the subject of much recent speculation after an analyst said the company had earlier aimed for an August launch but had pushed that back to October. Analysts had said further delays would make it miss the big year-end shopping season.

Despite repeated company denials of a delay, such talk was plausible to many because of Microsoft's history of repeatedly pushing back launches of major products.

"We have in the past missed dates, but there are dates in your life that you never miss, things like your birthday or Mother's Day, and on October 25 we are going to launch Windows XP, and that won't slip either," Jim Allchin, group vice president of Microsoft's platforms group, told a conference call.

Microsoft will back the product, called Windows XP, with a huge marketing campaign that will run in the "hundreds of millions" of dollars, and will be double the size of the Windows 95 launch in the first four months alone, Allchin said.

"We've got a great product and we are going to put the marketing energy and dollars behind it," Allchin said.

He declined to say how much the software will cost.

The news failed to rally Microsoft shares, which opened lower and fell \$1.66 to close at \$70.40 on the Nasdaq. The stock is off its year-high of \$82.88, but has soared more than 60 percent this year, making it the best performer in the Dow Jones Industrial Average of 30 companies.

Although the October date means Windows XP will make the holidays, it will miss the back-to-school rush that is another big PC-buying window.

"You probably will not see Windows XP on those machines. I don't mess around with these release dates. I don't mess around with quality. It would have been nice to make back-to-school but quality came first," Allchin said.

Allchin said Windows XP sales would not be affected by Microsoft's Xbox video game console, which is expected to launch in the same time frame and will also likely be a hot holiday item.

Some analysts have said that having two major consumer electronics products out at the same time could force shoppers to pick one or the other, but Allchin said consoles and computers were different enough that he wasn't worried about that issue.

"We are going to blow out the holiday season," Allchin said. "That holiday season is going to be great for the PC industry."

Windows XP is based on the same programming technology that underpins Windows 2000, which is more stable and secure than the old DOS technology in existing consumer versions.

The software will be sold in a Home Edition for consumers -- the biggest improvement to that line in six years -- and a Professional Edition for businesses that will supplant Windows 2000 Professional.

Lawmakers Rethink Support of Anti-Spam Bill

Several U.S. lawmakers said they would reconsider their support of an anti-spam bill Thursday after business lobbyists told a Congressional panel

that it could hurt legitimate online commerce.

The House of Representatives, in a 427-to-1 vote, passed a bill last year that sought to limit Internet junk mail, or "spam", but the bill stalled in the Senate.

Several members of the House Judiciary Committee said at a hearing Thursday that they would think twice before voting for the bill again, and lobbyists vowed to put up a spirited fight against passage of the legislation.

"We have become engaged and active, and are really focused on slowing this train down," said Marc Lackritz, president of the Securities Industry Association, a financial-services trade group.

The bill, sponsored by New Mexico Republican Heather Wilson, cleared the House Energy and Commerce Committee in March.

The Judiciary Committee held the hearing to compare Wilson's bill with a more limited bill sponsored by Virginia Republican Bob Goodlatte.

"I think all sides were caught asleep at the switch last year," said Georgia Republican Bob Barr.

Internet users complain that spam clogs networks and inboxes with unwanted offers for everything from credit cards to pornography.

Wilson's bill would give Internet users the right to remove their names from spammers' e-mail lists, and require spammers to include a valid return address in their e-mail messages for this purpose.

Companies that fail to comply would face civil and criminal penalties of \$500 for each violation, up to \$50,000.

"There is a right of free speech on the Internet, but there is no right to force you to listen," Wilson told the committee.

Lackritz and other industry representatives said Wilson's bill would encourage frivolous litigation and allow Internet service providers to block legitimate business communications such as bank statements alongside unsolicited spam.

Most e-mail abuses could be curbed by industry efforts and spam-blocking software, they said.

Several lawmakers said the strong enforcement provisions gave them pause as well.

"I'm just not convinced that we really want people sitting in federal penitentiaries for sending e-mail," said Michigan Rep. John Conyers, the committee's top Democrat.

Lackritz said he preferred Goodlatte's bill, which takes a narrower approach and contains no civil or criminal penalties.

But Goodlatte said opponents could not just wish anti-spam legislation away, as Wilson's bill was the one more likely to reach the House floor.

"All roads here lead through Mrs. Wilson's office, and we've got to find a way to accommodate your concerns. But something is going to be done in this area, and soon," he said.

A Judiciary Committee spokesman said the committee could vote down Wilson's bill, amend it, or substitute Goodlatte's bill in its place. If nothing is done before June 5, the bill will move to the House floor for passage, he said.

Hackers Unleash No-Limits Internet Browser

A new "no limits" Web browser created by a hacking group can allegedly bypass Internet censorship, though critics claim criminals may be able to use it to cloak clandestine activity on the Internet.

The collective known as "Cult of the Dead Cow", which bills itself as an "ethical" hacking group, said the browser is aimed at allowing users in repressive countries to request and receive censored documents and Web pages.

The browsing system uses peer-to-peer technology similar to that used by such controversial companies as Napster and Gnutella, both of which are under fire from intellectual property advocates.

Known as "Peekabooby," the system combines the technology with encryption, and is due to be unveiled at the DefCon hacker convention in Las Vegas in July, the annual "underground computer party" and the world's best-known and most-watched security conference.

The group has been promising the browser, formerly called "Project X," on its site for months. Like Napster, the file-sharing system that is under siege from the music recording industry, the browser allegedly uses no central server. Rather, it is a peer-to-peer networking tool that enables each client to send and receive information directly.

Members of the Peekabooby network can request specific documents or files to be put on the network. When the files appear, the browser will package them, encrypt them to further shield the data, then send them back to the individual computer making the request.

Members of the group, who go only by nicknames, said the anti-censorship Web browsing system is aimed at helping users in countries like China, Malaysia, Singapore and a host of Arab countries that screen out pornography or political material they deem subversive.

A user in China, for example, could request a banned Web page from a fellow Peekabooby member in Canada. Because of encryption, the governments involved could not filter the content using current technology.

The cult is best known for its Back Orifice and Back Orifice 2000 software, which allows users to hijack another person's Windows-based personal computer, then copy and delete files or run programs on it.

The tools were originally produced, the group said, to force Microsoft to improve Windows' security, which has drawn harsh criticism. The 2000 software program is available as open source code under GNU public license.

The new browser could become a nightmare for those trying to filter content. Although there is already technology designed to prevent

authorities from shielding content to individual computer users, there is no central server and no central authority on the peer-to-peer browser, and no one for authorities to arrest.

Internet cafes are increasingly popular in China among the country's youth, and the government has acted to curb the free flow of online information. Last month, the Chinese government announced that no new Internet cafes would be approved for three months while existing ones are investigated.

Repressive governments aren't the only global censors -- Germany, for example, bans all Nazi-related material, and Australia restricts access to pornography.

'Homepage' Virus Hits Outlook Again

An initially fast-spreading e-mail worm nicknamed "'HomePage," the cousin of February's "'Anna Kournikova" virus, hit thousands of users of Microsoft Outlook address directories in Asia and Europe on Wednesday.

Office workers in banks and telephone companies and government agencies who opened e-mail containing the virus -- technically known as VBSWG.X -- were suddenly redirected to one of four sexually explicit Web pages, experts said.

The virus also triggered a barrage of e-mail to anyone listed in an affected computer's Outlook e-mail address book, which in turn overloaded some organization's e-mail systems, according to anti-virus experts tracking the virus's spread.

But while HomePage once again revealed the vulnerability of computer networks to virus attacks, no more than 10,000 or so users were affected, analysts estimated.

The lessons learned in earlier time zones allowed anti-virus companies to update their software immunization programs, insulating computer users in the United States from the brunt of the attacks.

"A lot of people have learned hard lessons. They are a lot more aware of the need to act quickly," Brian Dumphy, director in charge of monitoring virus activity for Alexandria, Va. security consultant Riptech, said of the limited U.S. impact.

David Perry, global director of education for international anti-virus company Trend Micro Inc. of Tokyo, said the virus appeared to be based on the code of notorious South American script writer "'K Alomar," the suspected author of February's Kournikova virus, who is said to live in Argentina.

"Mr. Alomar. has been writing new revisions one after the other ever since the success of Anna Kournikova virus," Perry said.

But Alomar's activities have remained beyond the reach of authorities. Perry said police had arrested a Dutch teenager for using Alomar's virus tools to release Kournikova into "'the wild" -- where anyone using Microsoft Outlook, who is connected to the Internet, and lacking anti-virus protection may be hit.

“The virus writer of HomePage encrypted this one. He has hand-manipulated the code so that it wasn’t detect generically recognizable as an Alomar-inspired program,” Perry said of HomePage, whose author is officially unidentified so far.

A handful of anti-virus companies rushed to issue press releases announcing that they had detected the virus code and developed software inoculations to it.

Several experts expressed surprise that computers users would be vulnerable to what has become a well-understood method of attack.

The worm arrives in an e-mail with “HomePage” in the subject line and a short text message that says “Hi! You’ve got to see this page! It’s really cool ;0).” It contains an attached document which the user must open to trigger the bug.

The trick document is labeled “homepage.HTML.vbs.”

The virus exploits weaknesses in Visual Basic Script, or VBS, a programming tool that Microsoft Corp. offers to mainstream computer users to create custom software programs.

Security consultants such as Dumphy have advised Riptech’s hundreds of corporate customers to simply block programs using Virtual Basic Script from entering company e-mail systems. Riptech had received no complaints of HomePage attacks so far.

Trend’s Web-based map (<http://wtc.trendmicro.com/wtc/>), which tracks the most active viruses worldwide, showed HomePage with 1,534 user complaints in the last 24 hours, more than five times that of the second most common virus.

Trend assessed the virus as a “high” risk to unprotected computer users, although rivals such as McAfee and Computer Associates classified the risk as “moderate.”

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